No. 532.

THE

WORKHOUSE NURSE.

AMONG the numerous objects of poverty and affliction which come under the notice of the Christian visitor, how frequently are those persons to be met with who have the name of God continually upon their lips; who, without hesitation, say, "We have had no other friend to help us in our trouble but God, and if he had not helped us I know not what would have become of us." Yet how painful is it on further inquiry to discover, that these were merely commonplace assertions, instead of being in truth the utterance of a grateful heart! So far from being able to relate what God had done for them, or had even promised to them, how sad is it to find them totally ignorant of that God whose holy name they had taken upon their lips, and whom they had thus ventured to call their Friend! Nay, more, to find by their own confession that they were living in the entire neglect of all those means of grace, by which alone they could ever know any thing of God.

It is, indeed, a certain truth that God is the Friend of all mankind, in that "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust," Matt. v. 45; but how awful is it to contemplate the multitudes who, while they live in the

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enjoyment of these, his common mercies, do yet never raise one thought to him, in whom they live and move and have their being, and by whose bounty they are fed from day to day. Such persons do not at all answer the description of the people to whom "God is a very present help in trouble," Psa. xlvi. 1. God is indeed the help and the protector of all who put their trust in him, and "is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth," Psa. cxlv. 18. He forgetteth not the cry of the afflicted, nor the sighing of the needy, Psa. ix. 12; xii. 5. He says to his people, "Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." And, "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me," etc., Psa. l. 15, 23. With all the tenderness of a loving Father does God look down upon his children and his people, Psa. ciii. 13. He will never leave them nor forsake them. But the solemn question is, Who are his people? and who are they whom God will acknowledge as his friends? It is said of Abraham, that he was the friend of God; and our Lord has also been pleased to say, "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you," John xv. 14; and again, "My mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God, and do it," Luke viii. 21. But where is it said that those are his friends, and the objects of his special care, who never think upon his name, who day by day call not upon him in prayer, who keep not the sabbath as an holy day, though he has commanded them so to do, saying, "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy," Exod. xx. 8. How can they be his people who never read

their Bible; though Christ has said, "Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me?" John v. 39; who neglect the house of God, so as never to worship him in public, nor *hear* his word; how then can they *do* it?

Oh! how awful is it, in a Christian country, to see multitudes living in far greater neglect of the Lord who made them, and in whom they profess to believe as their Saviour, than the poor ignorant benighted heathen does of his dumb idol, which cannot save, for "it can neither kill nor make alive." How can it be expected that God should pour down his blessing on a people who never ask his blessing, who never seek his favour, who never feel his love; who have eaten their daily food without ever giving thanks to Him who bestowed it—to Him who has not only provided for the manifold wants of the body, but has far more richly provided for the wants of the never-dying soul? The body must soon perish; the soul can never die. "What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" Matt. xvi. 26, 27. Can any one form a just idea of the value of the immortal soul, when we are told by Christ himself that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life," John iii. 16. "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent," John xvii. 3.

As one of the visitors of a benevolent society, I was employed to convey relief to a poor woman during her confinement. I found S. W. poor indeed as it regarded

the things of this life; but I had every reason to believe she was one of the happy few who are rich in faith towards God, and consequently heirs of that kingdom which he has promised to all who love him.

Only those who have experienced it, can form an idea how cheering and delightful it is to find, amidst the abodes of poverty, wretchedness, and misery, here and there one who really does know, and love, and faithfully try to serve, that almighty gracious Friend, who says to the least of his children, and to the poorest of his servants, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee," Heb. xiii. 5.

Had this poor woman told me that God was and had been her friend in her time of trouble, I could readily have believed it, because I found her life and conduct answering to the description of those whom he condescends to call his "friends." She had his word in her possession. She read her Bible daily, with earnest prayer for the Holy Spirit to enlighten her mind, so as to understand it. She had family prayer; that is, night and morning she prayed with her children, besides teaching them to pray to God themselves. She and her husband were constant in their attendance at the house of God on the sabbath day; and if any of the little ones were ill, or confined at home, the parents would take it by turns to remain with them, so that neither of them was ever absent from the house of God the whole of the day.

At the chapel where S. W. attended there was service one day during the week; and I was told, that if ever

she happened to have a day's work on the same day as this service was held, she always rose two hours earlier in the morning, that she might finish her work in time to attend her chapel in the evening; so as not to lose the opportunity of seeking God in the sanctuary, and of hearing that word which imparted comfort and support to her soul under the trials of life. That she was really poor as it respects earthly riches, was evident by her being obliged to apply to the parish for a nurse from the workhouse, to be with her during the first few days of her illness; and not only so, but the kind-hearted nurse who was sent, more than once shared with S. W. the little pittance that she had brought each day from the house for her own dinner.

The husband had ill health, and for weeks together could not earn more than eight or nine shillings per week, which afforded a bare subsistence for a family of six in number; and he, being by trade a smith, required strengthening food. Yet not a murmur ever escaped their lips; on the contrary, with thankfulness have I heard him declare, "God has always fulfilled to us his promise, 'Bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure,'" Isa. xxxiii. 16. And they were contented, being enabled by faith to look forward for higher mercies and richer blessings in the world to come.

I found S. W. residing in a large and more commodious room than the poor generally obtain, but it was in a stable-yard gallery, where the penthouse projected so far over the window, as to exclude the light to that degree that it was almost impossible for any one to see

to read, excepting close to the window, especially at the season of the year in which I paid my first visit, it being the latter end of November. I regretted exceedingly being thus prevented reading the word of God to her, and endeavoured, as well as I could, to supply the deficiency, by repeating from memory different portions of the Scripture, and among many others that of Luke xi. 9—13, "If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" "And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." The poor humble nurse had retired to an obscure corner of the room immediately on my entrance, and remained there during the whole period of my visit, as still and as quiet as possible. I well remember her tall thin figure; but there was not sufficient light for me to discern her features at the distance she sat, and I concluded my visit without any other notice of her, or even thought of her, than the usual salutation on my entrance, and a farewell on my leaving the room. "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord," Isa. lv. 8; and thus it proved in the case of this poor woman: although unnoticed by the visitor, unheeded by a fellow creature, the eye of One rested on her, "unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid." She was not forgotten of her God: he, in his mercy and in his love, remembered her for good.

It was about eighteen months after this visit, while I

was residing for a few months by the sea-side, that I received, to my great surprise, a letter from S. W., for I knew not how she had obtained my address. She began by making an apology for the liberty she had taken in writing to me, yet felt confident that I would excuse it when I knew the cause. The letter then went on to state that she had just returned from the infirmary, where she had witnessed the triumphant departure (for she could not call it the death) of the poor woman who had nursed her in her last confinement; and she had in consequence felt it her duty to write to me, because the peace, and joy, and consolation experienced by this poor nurse in her last moments were connected with my first visit to S. W. She had listened with attention to the different portions of the sacred Scripture which had been repeated, and God was pleased to impress that part out of the Gospel of St. Luke so strongly on her mind that she could not get rid of it. Night and day the words, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find," etc., sounded in her ears, and she could get no rest until she came to S. W., requesting her to find them for her in the word of God. This was done; and upon her return home she got a Bible belonging to the ward, and sought them out for herself. From this time she read and searched the Scriptures daily, with earnest prayer for the teaching of the Holy Spirit; and every one who knew her bore testimony to the consistency of her conduct during the period that her life was spared. She became each day more contented and cheerful, so as for it to be observed by those around her; and she did not hesitate to confess from

what source she derived all her comfort; and in the hour of her departure, she entreated and exhorted all those who stood around her bed to read the word of God for themselves, that they might obtain the same heavenly consolation that she enjoyed, through the knowledge of Christ Jesus, as her Lord and Saviour.

Her illness was of very short duration, but she retained her senses to the last; and such was the happy state of her mind, such peace and joy did this humble Christian experience in her last hour, that her soul took its flight from earth while she was singing the praises of God; leaving those who stood around her lost in astonishment at a scene so unusual, especially in a workhouse. From the time that the sound of the gospel reached her ear, and the truth touched her heart, she had earnestly turned to God in prayer, and he in his mercy answered her, and enabled her to depart from earth and enter heaven with praise.

Upon my return to London I called on S. W., and inquired if she could give me any particulars of the former part of this poor nurse's life. She informed me that while she was nursing her, she had mentioned, that in early life she was blessed with a pious mother, who had taught her to fear and love God, and to read his holy word. At twelve years of age she was obliged to leave her parents' roof, and go out to service, never more to enjoy the sweet privilege of a mother's watchful eye, instruction, and pious counsel. And it appeared that the mother was too poor to give her child a Bible when she was leaving home.

She went into a family who kept no other servant

besides herself; from this she passed on to another of the same description, the master and mistress of which sometimes went to church themselves, but they never allowed their poor servant any part of the sabbath to worship God in public. Thus, from the time that she had left her mother's roof, had she passed the whole of her life, without ever having once entered the house of God; and without ever having heard the sound of the gospel, until the day that she listened to the precious promises of Christ Jesus our Lord, as they fell from the lips of a stranger. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." She heard, and at once obeyed; she searched the word of God, she asked for the Holy Spirit, she believed in the Lord Jesus Christ as her Almighty Saviour; and he permitted her happy ransomed soul to begin, on earth, that song of thanksgiving which in heaven shall never end. As Paul and Silas made the prison walls to resound with the praises of their God, Acts xvi. 25, so did this humble believer make the walls of a workhouse to echo with the praises of her Redeemer. It was faith in Christ that sustained the soul of the great apostle of the Gentiles; and it was the same vital, animating principle, that filled the heart of an obscure individual in a poor-house with joy and gladness. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith," 1 John v. 4. Faith in Christ enables the soul to rejoice amidst persecution and imprisonment; to triumph over poverty, sickness, and even death itself. On the wings of faith the happy spirit,

released from its earthly tabernacle, soars aloft, shakes off the dust of earth, and enters heaven with songs of joy. Oh, what a change! Where is the imagination that can fully realize the sudden transition? In one moment to exchange the sick ward of an infirmary, for mansions of eternal glory. One minute to be surrounded with companions suffering under the pressure of poverty, sickness, sin, and misery, and the next minute to be admitted into the presence of Christ, encircled with a host of ransomed spirits before the throne, and uniting with them in their song of joy and victory: "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen," Rev.i.5, 6. "The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, to make them inherit glory," 1 Sam. ii. 7, 8.

My dear reader, do you feel anxious to enjoy the same peace and comfort in a dying hour? Then seek to obtain like precious faith. Follow the example of this poor woman. She listened with attention to the word of God, and lost no time in obeying the command of her Lord. She was poor and needy—you and I are the same: let us then go in faith and prayer to the same Almighty Friend, who has all power in heaven and in earth, and who says, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out," John vi. 37. In Him, there is an infinite fulness to pardon all our sins, and to supply all our wants. Let us seek, day by day, to be enriched out of the plenitude of his grace, and to be filled

with that Holy Spirit, who is the seal and earnest of the exceeding riches of his glory.

Is there not, in the case of this poor nurse, much encouragement for pious mothers to sow the seed of Divine truth in the minds of their children as early as possible, while they have the opportunity; not knowing how soon they may be taken from their children, or the children from them, never to see each other again until they meet at the bar of God? Happy are those parents who, with affectionate kindness, have taught their little ones to read the word of God; who have trained them up in the love and fear of the Lord; who have sown the seed in faith and prayer, and, it may be, with many tears! Should such parents not be spared on earth to see the fruit of their labour, yet we are told, "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy," Psa. cxxvi. 5. In heaven, the mother shall see that her labour was not in vain in the Lord. There shall the parent who sowed the seed, and the child who reaped the blessing, rejoice together.

There is another class who, by the perusal of this little narrative, may be reminded of their deep responsibility to God—those who have servants under their care, but appear to forget "that the poorest servant in a family has a soul to be saved—a soul more precious to him, or to her, than aught beside on earth."

Dear reader, if you and I live in a Christian country, and have been baptized into the name of Christ, oh let us not live as do the heathen who know not God. If we believe, we shall love and obey Him who died to save our souls, who shed his blood to ransom us from

death. Wherever there is vital faith, there will be love and obedience. May you and I count it our highest honour and delight to serve that gracious Lord and Master, who, in his infinite condescension, says, "Where I am, there shall also my servant be," John xii. 26. Oh! who can describe the unspeakable happiness of that soul which, as it enters heaven, shall be welcomed with those blessed words, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord!" Matt. xxv. 21.

"Save us, O Lord our God, and gather us from among the heathen, to give thanks unto thy holy name, and to triumph in thy praise," Psa. cvi. 47.

THE FRIEND IN NEED.

One there is, above all others,
Well deserves the name of Friend!
His is love beyond a brother's,
Costly, free, and knows no end:
They who once his kindness prove
Find it everlasting love.

Which of all our friends to save us
Could or would have shed his blood?
But our Saviour died to have us
Pardoned, and brought nigh to God.
This was boundless love indeed!
Jesus is a Friend in need.

Oh! for grace our hearts to soften;
Teach us, Lord, at length to love:
We, alas! forget too often,
What a Friend we have above;
But when home our souls are brought
We will love thee as we ought.

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